

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 02588 070830Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 SIG-03 MMO-01
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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2909
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
USMISSION GENEVA

CONFIDENTIAL CANBERRA 2588

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, VN, AS
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAM

REF: (A) STATE 73027, (B) CANBERRA 2306

1. AMBASSADOR CALLED NICK PARKINSON (SECRETARY, DFA) UPON RECEIPT OF REF (A) TO CONVEY APPRECIATION FOR CONTINUING GOA WILLINGNESS TO SHARE THE REFUGEE BURDEN, AS EVIDENCED BY ITS NEW PROGRAM FOR AN ADDITIONAL 2,000 INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. PARKINSON WAS GRATEFUL FOR OUR KIND WORDS, AND SAID HE WOULD SPREAD THEM AROUND THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GOA. HE AGREED THAT THE PROBLEM OF CARING FOR INDOCHINESE BOAT REFUGEES WAS A DIFFICULT ONE, BUT SAID THAT IT WOULD BE OUT OF CHARACTER FOR AUSTRALIA NOT TO DO ITS PART. AMBASSADOR AND PARKINSON

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AGREED THAT EMBASSY OFFICERS WOULD MEET WITH DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS TO REVIEW DETAILS OF REF (A).

2. QUESTIONS IN PARAS 2 AND 4 HANDLED BY REF (B).

3. WITH RESPECT TO LONG-TERM PROBLEM OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN QUITE SUCCESSFUL IN

TAKING REFUGEES, PROVIDING THEM WITH BASIC SKILLS (INCLUDING BOTH LANGUAGE AND WORK SKILLS), AND PLACING THEM IN COMMUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT. REFUGEE OFFICERS WITH WHOM EMBASSY MET (ALAN BRACLAY AND GREG HUMPHRIES) SAID AUSTRALIA HAD EXPERIENCED VERY LITTLE PROBLEM IN ASSIMILATION OF REFUGEES INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES/EMPLOYMENT. EMBASSY HAS JUST RECEIVED FROM BARCLAY A COPY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS' "INDOCHINESE SETTLEMENT REPORT" WHICH WILL BE POUCHED TO D/HA. THIS REPORT DETAILS THE PLACEMENT AND SETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEE FAMILIES IN AUSTRALIA AND MAKES MOST INTERESTING READING.

4. IN INFORMAL CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, A SENIOR IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL RAISED FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH US THE QUESTION OF THE DURATION AND ULTIMATE EXTENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAMS. IT WAS HIS VIEW, HE SAID, THAT MANY OF THE "TRUE REFUGEES" (DEFINED IN TERMS OF POLITICAL PERSECUTION OR OTHER PHYSICAL JEOPARDY) HAVE ALREADY LEFT VIETNAM, AND THAT INCREASING NUMBERS OF THOSE LEAVING THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDOCHINA ARE "ECONOMIC REFUGEES" RATHER THAN "POLITICAL REFUGEES." WE RECALLED THAT THIS QUESTION CAME UP IN THE THAI CONTEXT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AND WAS ADJUDGED TO DIFFICULT AN ISSUE TO TRY TO SOLVE BY MEANS OF "DEFINITIONS." FURTHERMORE, REFUGEES WHO HAVE FLED ANY COMMUNIST STATE.

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IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR REASONS FOR HAVING DONE SO, BECOME "POLITICAL" REFUGEES ONCE THEY HAVE ESCAPED; TO ATTEMPT TO RETURN THEM WOULD SIMPLY PLACE THEM IN IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL JEOPARDY. THE GOA OFFICIAL WHO RAISED THE MATTER ACCEPTED THAT POINT, BUT NEVERTHELESS EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN THAT WE MAY BE WITNESSING A BREAKDOWN IN TRADITIONAL (LEGAL) RESPECT FOR NATIONAL BOUNDARIES AND SEEING A SIMPLE DECISION BY PEOPLE TO LEAVE ONE COUNTRY BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIKE IT THERE, MOVING TO ANOTHER WHERE THEY BELIEVE THEY MAY BE BETTER OFF. MOST JAMAICANS ARE UNHAPPY IN JAMAICA AND WOULD RATHER LIVE IN THE U.K.; MANY JAMAICANS ARE SUFFICIENTLY POOR THAT LIQUIDATING THEIR MATERIAL HOLDINGS IS NO GREAT PROBLEM, AND THEY ARE ABANDONING LITTLE OTHER THAN AN UNHAPPY IMPOVERISHED LIFE WHEN THEY GO TO THE U.K. LIKEWISE, MANY MEXICANS WOULD PROBABLY RATHER LIVE IN THE U.S., AND THERE MAY BE LITTLE TO KEEP THEM IN MEXICO OTHER THAN THE PROBABILITY THAT THEY WILL BE APPREHENDED TRYING TO CROSS THE BORDER ILLEGALLY. IF THERE IS NO SUCH FEAR ON THE PART OF TENS OR EVEN HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF INDOCHINESE, WHAT IS TO DETER WAVE AFTER WAVE OF "ECONOMIC" MIGRANTS WHOSE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE IS THAT THEY WOULD RATHER LIVE

SOMEWHERE ELSE AND WHOSE ONLY LIMITATION IS THE PHYSICAL
AVAILABILITY OF BOATS?

5. WE REPORT THE ABOVE IN SOME DETAIL NOT TO LEND CREDENCE
TO THE ARGUMENT, NOR DO WE HAVE ANY DESIRE TO REOPEN THE
ISSUES THAT SURFACED IN THAILAND LAST YEAR. IN VIEW OF
THE GOA OFFICIAL'S SENIOR RANK, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT
WORTH NOTING THAT THERE ARE SOME IN HIGH POSITIONS IN THE
GOA WHO ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER -- FOUR YEARS
AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON -- WE ARE STILL WITNESSING REFU-
GEE MIGRATION BASED ON POLITICAL PERSECUTION, OR SIMPLY
MIGRATION BASED ON THE FACT THAT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF
VIETNAMESE REMEMBER ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BENEFITS THAT
THEY ENJOYED UNDER A NON-COMMUNIST SYSTEM AND, GIVEN THE
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AVAILABILITY OF MEANS TO GET TO IT, WOULD RATHER LIVE
UNDER CAPITALISM.

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Message Attributes

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